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Shiloh

Mildred Throne

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Shiloh

During the weeks after the capture of Fort Donelson, the Union army moved south and concentrated at Pittsburg Landing on the Tennessee River. The Confederate forces of General Albert Sidney Johnston were gathered at Corinth, some twenty miles southwest of the Landing. By April 5 Grant had some 40,000 men at Pittsburg, plus about 5,800 more at Crump's Landing a few miles north. The Army of the Ohio, under Major General Don Carlos Buell, with some 18,000 men, was marching from Nashville to join Grant. When ready, they proposed to attack Johnston at Corinth.

Grant had stationed his men in camps between two small streams that emptied into the river above and below Pittsburg. Roads and swamps crisscrossed the campground, while here and there were clearings and a few farmhouses. The rest of the land was rolling and wooded more or less heavily. Near the center of this four-mile-square camp and on the top of a ridge was an old abandoned road, sunken from many years of use. Farther to the west, in the "front line" of the army, stood a small meeting house called Shiloh Church. The sunken road would save the Union

Army on April 6; the little church would give its name to the battle fought there.

Grant's Army of the Tennessee consisted of six divisions commanded by Generals William T. Sherman, J. A. McClernand, B. M. Prentiss, W. H. L. Wallace, S. A. Hurlbut, and Lew Wallace. Five were at Pittsburg Landing on April 6, while the sixth, under Lew Wallace, was at Crump's Landing. Eleven Iowa regiments — the 2nd, 3rd, 6th, 7th, 8th, 11th, 12th, 13th, 14th, 15th, and 16th — were included in these divisions. Farthest from the Landing were the divisions of Sherman and Prentiss; back of Sherman was McClernand, while back of Prentiss was Hurlbut. Closest to the Landing was the camp of W. H. L. Wallace.

One Iowa regiment, the 6th, was with Sherman; the 11th and 13th were with McClernand; the 3rd with Hurlbut; and the 2nd, 7th, 8th, 12th, and 14th with Wallace. Just landing on the morning of April 6 was the 15th, while the 16th, still at the Landing, had been ordered to join Prentiss.

For a few days before April 6 there had been several clashes with Confederate cavalry, and some prisoners had been taken on both sides, but no real warning had come to Grant's officers that the whole Confederate army had left Corinth and was marching toward Pittsburg Landing. Johnston had moved his troops, numbering some 40,000, out of Corinth on April 3; by nightfall on April 5, they were ready. Second in command to

Johnston was P. G. T. Beauregard. The four corps of the Confederate Army of the Mississippi were commanded by Major Generals Leonidas Polk, Braxton Bragg, W. J. Hardee, and Brigadier General J. C. Breckinridge.

Grant was at breakfast at his headquarters at Savannah, nine miles north of Pittsburg, on the morning of April 6 when he first heard the sound of heavy firing from the direction of the Landing. Boarding his headquarters boat, the *Tigress*, he hurried to the Landing where he found his divisions under attack all along the front line, while the reserves were rushing forward. Union pickets, scouting before dawn, had run into the entire Confederate army, supposedly at Corinth twenty miles away.

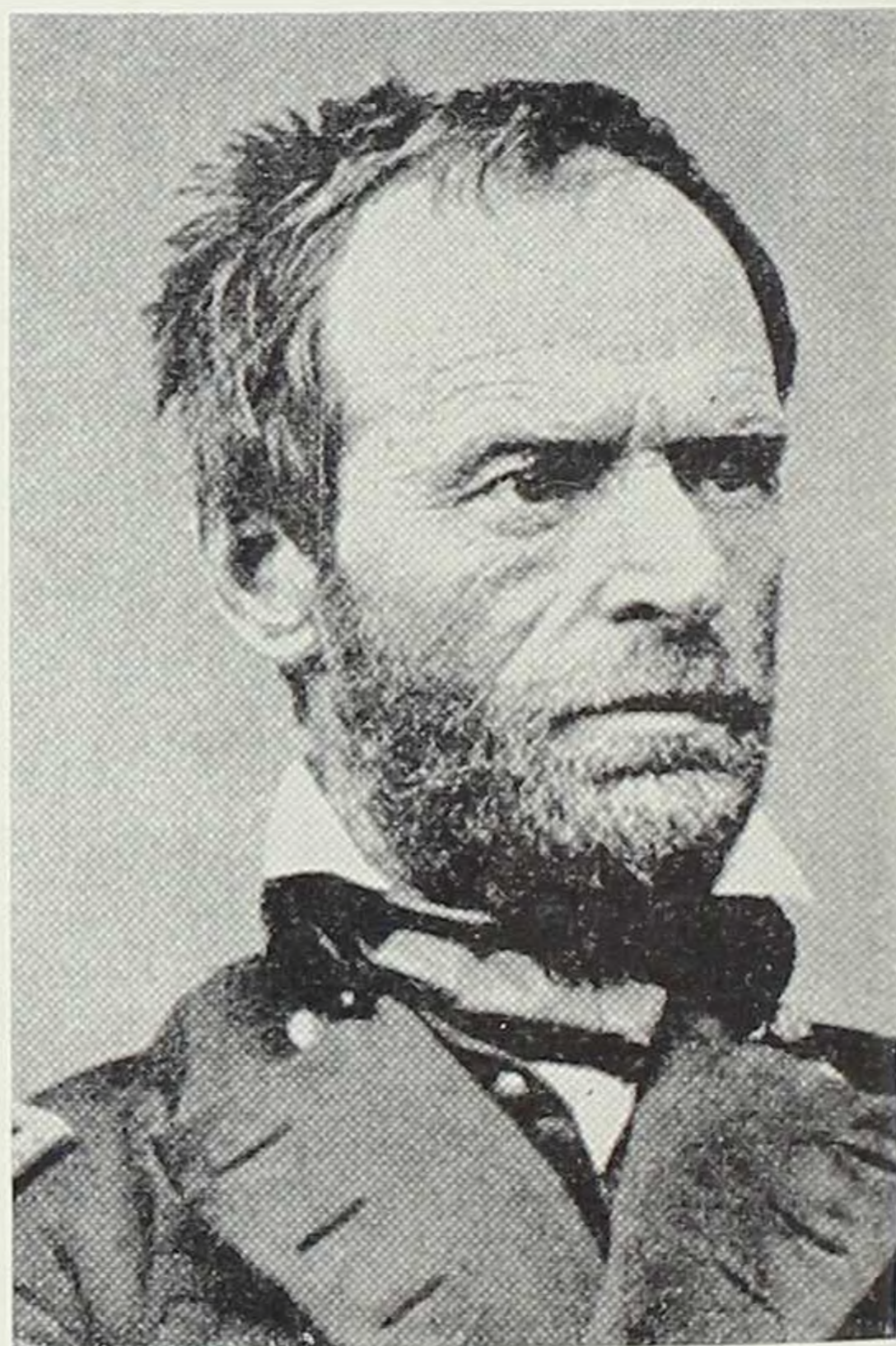
Word went back at once to Prentiss and to Sherman, to McClernand, Wallace, and Hurlbut, and in the Union lines the ominous long roll from the drummers echoed from camp to camp.

By 7 A. M. Sherman's division was in position, but the first blow on his left did not come until almost 8 o'clock. Confederate General P. R. Cleburne reported that he first saw the Union army in "line of battle" behind their first encampment. So much for the wild stories soon to be circulated in the North that some of Sherman's men were taken in their tents, and that the rest fled from the front at the first shots. Actually, Cleburne's initial assault on Sherman suffered a "quick and

THE GENERALS



ULYSSES S. GRANT



WILLIAM T. SHERMAN

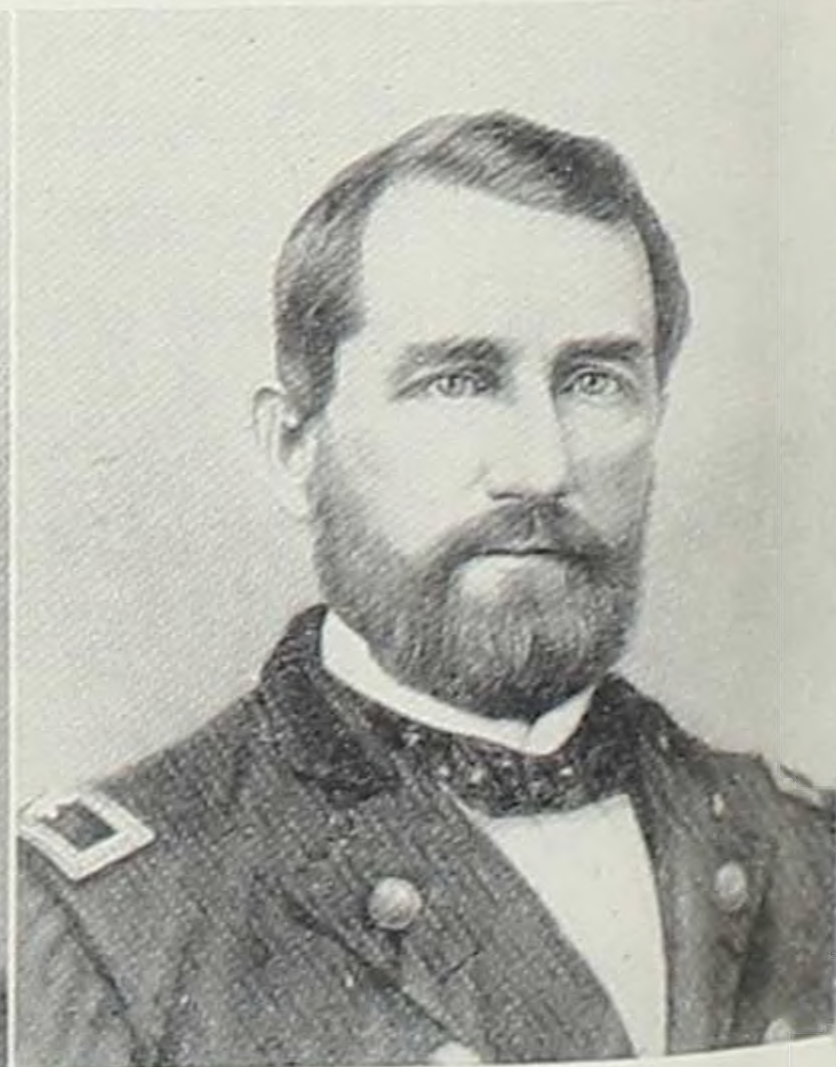
THREE OF IOWA'S BRIGADIER GENERALS



WILLIAM W. BELKNAP



MARCELLUS M. CROCKER



JAMES M. TUTTLE

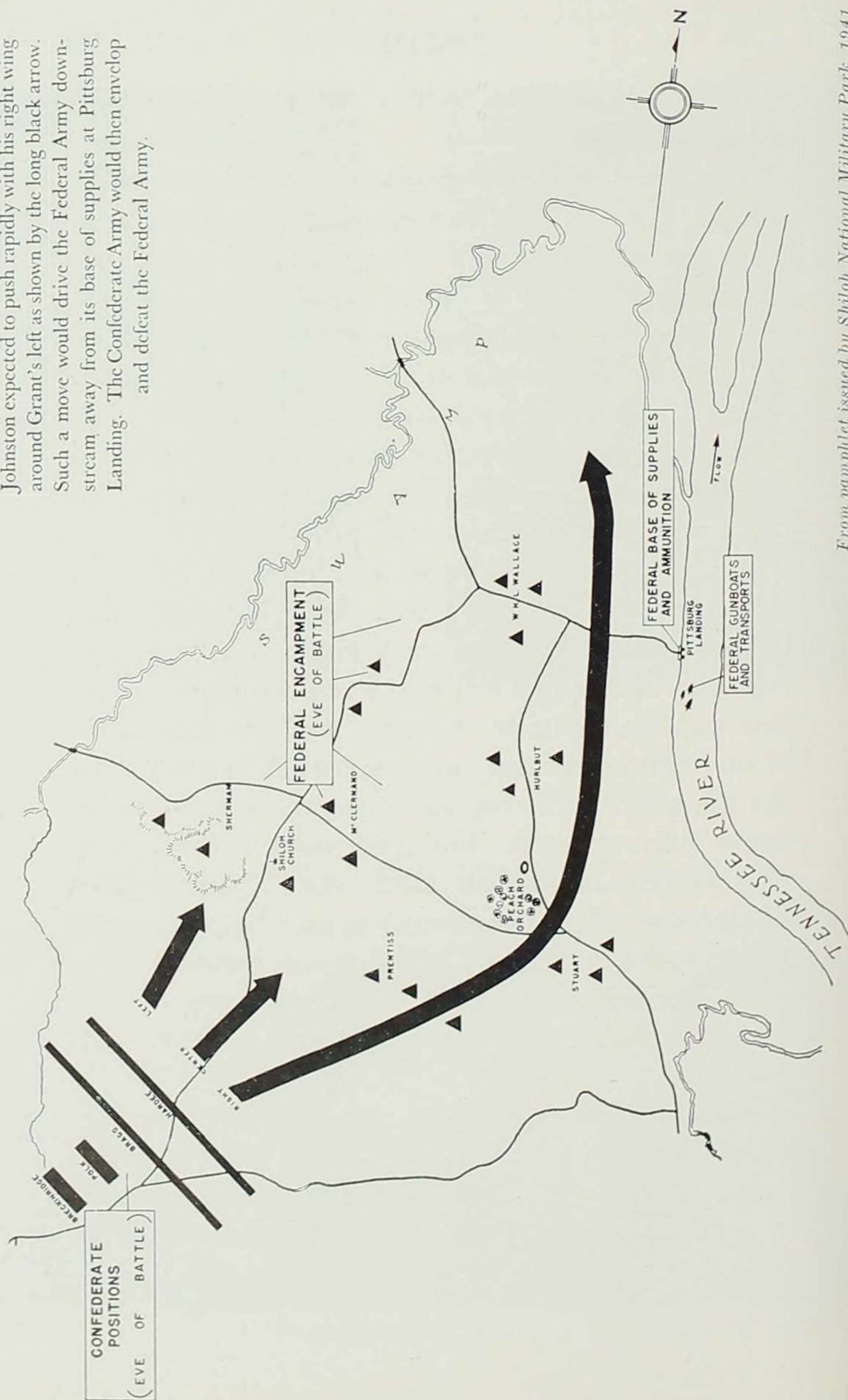
bloody repulse," according to the Confederate commander himself.

The 6th Iowa, in a brigade commanded by its colonel, John A. McDowell, was stationed far to the right of Sherman's line. They watched and listened to the roar of battle but were not engaged until later. When Sherman's left began to crumble and was finally turned at 10 o'clock, his right was ordered to withdraw to avoid being flanked. Only in this retreat did the 6th Iowa come under fire, and then they suffered the greatest loss of any Iowa regiment that day — 52 killed.

The 11th and 13th Iowa (Colonels A. H. Hare and M. M. Crocker), with McClellan's first brigade, came forward on the run to fill the gap between Sherman's left and Prentiss' right. Their first experience under fire unnerved the men of the Iowa regiments, and they retreated in confusion. As the battle wore on, however, these retreats became more orderly. The men would hold a position as long as possible, then retire to a new point of defense. Their muskets became begrimed and their faces blackened with cartridge powder; ramrods, necessary for firing their guns, were lost. Yet they fought on until their ammunition gave out.

Hurlbut sent one brigade of his division to support Sherman's left, and himself led the other two brigades to support Prentiss. With Hurlbut was the 3rd Iowa, under Colonel Nelson G. Wil-

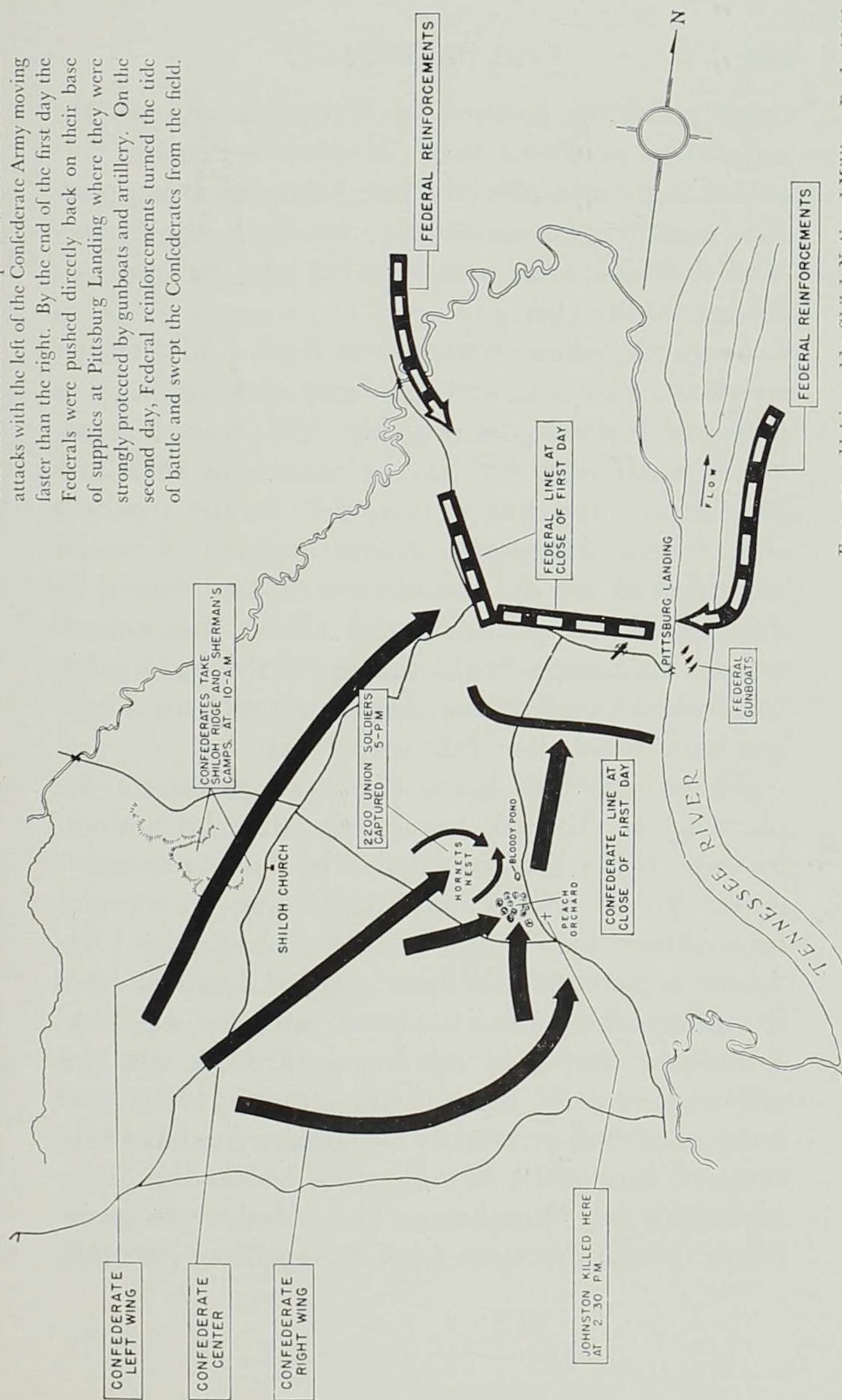
Johnston expected to push rapidly with his right wing around Grant's left as shown by the long black arrow. Such a move would drive the Federal Army downstream away from its base of supplies at Pittsburg Landing. The Confederate Army would then envelop and defeat the Federal Army.



The Confederate Plan of Attack

From pamphlet issued by Shiloh National Military Park, 1941

The battle of Shiloh developed into a series of frontal attacks with the left of the Confederate Army moving faster than the right. By the end of the first day the Federals were pushed directly back on their base of supplies at Pittsburg Landing where they were strongly protected by gunboats and artillery. On the second day, Federal reinforcements turned the tide of battle and swept the Confederates from the field.



The Battle As It Was Actually Fought
From pamphlet issued by Shiloh National Military Park, 1941.

liams. Taking position on Prentiss' left, on the edge of a peach orchard, Hurlbut set up his line at an angle and placed three batteries in support. His position was a strong one, and the enemy hurled attack after attack at his line, only to suffer repeated reverses.

Prentiss, whose troops had been "pulverized" by the first attack, had retreated after rallying as many of his men as possible, first from his forward position to his line of tents and then into his third — and last — position. At the top of a ridge, near Hurlbut's peach orchard, Prentiss stumbled on the old abandoned road protected by dense woods and underbrush. From this natural trench his troops could fire upon the enemy but could themselves remain almost untouched. Prentiss had found the "Hornet's Nest."

There were no Iowans with Prentiss on the morning of April 6, but by the time he had retreated to the sunken road, five Iowa regiments under W. H. L. Wallace had come up to reinforce him: the 2nd, 7th, 8th, 12th, and 14th. These regiments had been camped farthest from the point of attack. Ordered into line at about 8 o'clock, they had advanced through ever increasing crowds of soldiers, running from the battle, and had arrived at the sunken road at about the time, probably, that Prentiss succeeded in establishing his line there. The Wallace brigade, filling the gap between McClernand and Prentiss,

had found "the only fixed point of the Union line."

The last two Iowa regiments to come under fire were the 15th and 16th, at the Landing that morning. They received orders almost at once to advance to support McClelland, and they went into battle on a run, carrying guns they had never even fired. In the confusion, they were led too far forward into an open field, where they suffered heavy losses before being pulled back to the shelter of McClelland's line. In those hours, when the men of the 15th and 16th first saw the "gray coats" and heard the "unearthly rebel yell," when they saw their comrades and officers falling, hysteria gripped them. Retreating in confusion, with all semblance of company or regimental organization gone, they were reassembled by Major William W. Belknap of the 15th, who took command when both the colonels, Hugh T. Reid and Alexander Chambers, were wounded.

By 2 o'clock in the afternoon the Union line was shorter but still intact. Albert Sidney Johnston was then with his troops on their right, urging them on to attack the Union left where Hurlbut stood stubbornly in his peach orchard. Leading his troops in a charge, Johnston was killed, even as Hurlbut's line began to crumble. The Confederate command now shifted to Beauregard.

With Hurlbut's retreat, Wallace and Prentiss were left alone in the abandoned road which the Confederates would name the "Hornet's Nest."

Had it not been for the troops in this one sector, the Union army would indeed have been defeated. Earlier in the day Grant had visited Prentiss and had told him to hold his position "at all hazards." This Prentiss proposed to do. Colonel James M. Tuttle of the 2nd Iowa managed to get two of the Iowa regiments, the 2nd and 7th, out of the trap that was fast closing around them, but the 8th, 12th, and 14th Iowa, along with the 58th Illinois, were caught with Prentiss. General Wallace fell, mortally wounded, in the retreat, the highest ranking Union officer to die at Shiloh.

The Union line was now broken everywhere except in the center. Prentiss, with some 2,200 men, was in the middle of a closing ring of Confederates. But he still held out, determined "to harass [the enemy] and retard his progress so long as might be possible." At last, about 5:30, realizing that if he did not surrender, his men would all be killed, Prentiss mounted a tree stump and waved a white handkerchief. His stubbornness had bought another hour and a half for Grant at the Landing. The men with Prentiss, exhausted as they were, gave up reluctantly, some even trying to continue firing, others breaking up their guns by smashing them against trees. They felt that their long defense of the line had failed; not for many years would they realize what they had done that day. But the Confederates knew. Albert Sidney Johnston's son later wrote of Pren-

tiss, Hurlbut, and Wallace: "These generals have received scant justice for their stubborn defense." The delay in the Confederate attack which these three caused, "was the salvation of Grant's army." By the time Prentiss surrendered, it was too late in the day for Beauregard to complete the rout by attacking Grant at the Landing.

Grant had made good use of the time Prentiss gave him. By dusk his remaining troops were gathered on the bluff at the Landing, his guns in position. At last General Lew Wallace, who had been lost all day, trying to find the battle, arrived with 5,000 men. And across the Tennessee the first troops of Buell's Army of the Ohio appeared, boarding the steamers which ferried them over the river. During the night rain fell heavily, the men huddled in what shelter they could find, steamboats kept up a steady traffic, bringing reinforcements, and two gunboats shelled the Confederate camps. With dawn, Grant and Buell were ready.

Now it was the Confederates' turn to be surprised. Reduced to about 20,000, from their original 40,000, and with no hope of reinforcement, they fought bravely and stubbornly, giving ground slowly, and sometimes even mounting counterattacks. Finally, at 2:30 in the afternoon they began a careful retreat from the field that had been theirs on Sunday.

The Iowa troops did not see much action on Monday. Having been through the worst of the



Harper's Weekly, April 26, 1862

The Battle of Shiloh

fighting on Sunday, having lost three of their regiments, and with many of their officers dead or wounded, most of them were held in the reserve during the second day's battle. The 2nd Iowa made a bayonet charge on the enemy; the 7th captured a Confederate battery; and the 13th fought for a time with Buell. The other Iowa regiments did no active fighting.

As the weary Confederate troops retreated, the Union men sought their old camps. Some 3,500 men of both armies lay dead on the battlefield, and many more would die from wounds received during the battle.

The Iowa casualties at Shiloh were more than one-third of the nearly 7,000 Iowans engaged: 235 killed, 999 wounded, and 1,147 missing or captured, for a total of 2,381. In addition to those killed in the battle, 116 of the wounded died within days or weeks as a result of their wounds. Iowa, at first cheered by the victory, was stunned as the casualty lists grew. The war had now become a reality.

The battlefield of Shiloh is today a national military park of about 3,700 acres, ten acres of which is a national cemetery where 3,650 men are buried, two-thirds of them unidentified. Both Union and Confederate markers dot the field, indicating the locations of the various regiments.

Iowa's state monument and her eleven regi-

mental monuments were dedicated in November, 1906, by a group of Iowans, many of them veterans of the battle, led by Governor Albert B. Cummins. The state monument is a granite shaft topped with a bronze globe and eagle, while at the base a figure of "Fame" inscribes a tribute to the Iowa men who fought and died at Shiloh.

The Iowa Monument
At Shiloh National Military Park

